

Socialist Worker

SUPPORT ICTU DEMO ON 9 FEBRUARY...

WE NEED A GENERAL STRIKE

BREAK THE LINKS WITH LABOUR PARTY

THE ICTU leaders have called for major union mobilisations on Saturday 9 February. Demonstrations are taking place in Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Sligo, and Limerick.

The main theme of the demonstrations is against austerity.

Quite rightly, the union leaders say that there must be a re-structuring of the bank debts so that the Irish people are not burdened for decades to come.

They want to use the occasion of Ireland's EU Presidency to tell its top elite that the debt must be reduced.

The unions also want a stimulus programme to create jobs.

Despite our vigorous criticism of the ICTU, Socialist Worker urges full support for the demonstration.

All of us have an interest in cancelling the debt – and the union leaders should be saying that openly.

We may disagree with the lack of protest activity from the ICTU but when they do call action, we should join in.

But we should also go much further than the ICTU.

The union leaders are playing down criticism of the government and concentrating their fire on the EU. Yet it is the FG-Labour government which is carrying through cuts.

Government decisions

They decided, for example, to introduce a tax break for company executives to send their children to private schools while they slashed benefits for lone parents.

They rejected an EU Commission proposal to put a tax on financial transactions which would have raised €500 million. Instead, they imposed a property tax on our homes.

The EU leaders are terrible and their only interest is in saving big European banks. But the Irish government are part of the same set up.

They, too, put the interests of Irish bankers ahead of the vast majority of



the Irish people.

So let's direct our anger at BOTH the EU leaders and the Irish government.

The ICTU also wants a one day protest when most people are off work as a way of 'letting off steam' and strengthening their credibility in the eyes of members as they try to sell a Croke Park 2 agreement.

Everyone knows that a government will not change course because of one demonstration.

They will not refuse to pay the debt and establish a public works programme to create jobs just because we marched

on a Saturday.

Increase the resistance

We need to go much further and call for a national one day general strike.

A general strike, which brought the country to a halt, would be a serious signal that the days when workers accepted defeat after defeat were over.

It would be a reminder to the government that they do not have all the power – and force them to back off.

The union leaders are totally opposed to this course, however, because many of

them are members of the Irish Labour Party.

They will not take the action that is required to stop attacks on workers because they do not want to rock the boat for Labour.

We should use the occasion when many trade unionists come together, therefore, to raise two key issues:

We need a one day general strike to oppose austerity and debt repayments.

We need to break the links between major unions like SIPTU and UNITE and the Labour Party.

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THE ABORTION DEBATE:

New pro-choice campaign to fight for legislation

By MADELEINE JOHANSSON

AT the end of 2012 it seemed likely that legislation in line with the X case would be introduced early in 2013.

The past year has seen mass pro-choice mobilisations forcing the government to act on an issue they were hoping to delay and ignore like previous governments.

A new movement

The 20 year anniversary of the X case in February gathered Pro-Choice activists while the government set up an 'expert group' due to report by July.

The report never came and in July Pro-Choice activists came out onto the streets in opposition to the anti-abortion group Youth Defence's disgusting billboard campaign.

The actions were followed by a 'March 4 Choice' in September where over 2000 people came out demanding abortion rights.

However it was the tragic death of Savita Halappanavar that really touched people's hearts.

Twenty thousand people marched in Dublin demanding immediate X case legislation, as well as free, safe and legal abortion.

Following this the government had no choice but to publish the 'expert group' report and promise legislation in early 2013.

We are the majority

In the past few weeks there have been some very positive developments for the Pro Choice side.

During the Oireachtas health committee hearing many interest



groups, medical and legal professionals had the opportunity to make submissions with regards to the legislation.

The outcome of this was clearly that the majority of medical as well as legal professionals agree about the necessity of legislation in line with X including the risk of suicide.

The input of the Catholic Church and Anti-Choice groups like the Lora Institute seem archaic and out of touch with the majority of people.

Two separate opinion polls, by the Sunday Business Post and Red C, which were held in the past month showed that the majority of people (between 60-80%) are in favour of legislation in line with X, including the risk

of suicide.

Between 36-40% are in favour of abortion being available by request under any circumstance.

This shows a big shift in the attitudes of people in Ireland and the decline of the power of the Catholic Church.

The polls also showed that young people are more likely to be in favour of more liberal abortion legislation, while there was no difference between Dublin and the rest of the country.

Also, the recent release of Savita's medical notes show that she had requested a termination early in her miscarriage but this was denied due to 'legal complications', proving the horrific consequences of the Irish

legislation.

The Church and the State

These positive developments should not make pro-choice campaigners complacent or confident that the government will legislate in the broadest way.

The Fine Gael-Labour government is not in power to implement the will of the majority, but rather to serve the ruling elite.

This ruling elite still have links with the Catholic Church as the attendance of GAA presidents at a recent 'Vigil for Life' shows.

Refusing women the power to fully control their own bodies helps to control the population generally, whilst the majority of

schools are still run by religious institutions.

In addition, the Anti-Choice groups will use all the organisational and lobbying power that they have to push for the most restrictive legislation possible, especially attempting to exclude suicide.

An online video which has gone viral among pro-choice campaigners shows these groups asking Americans for donations.

Much of the large amounts of money these organisations receive come precisely from the US, mainly because American anti-abortion campaigners see Ireland as the last place in Europe with conservative abortion legislation and something they can use to restrict abortion availability in the US.

Organise and keep fighting

The new Abortion Rights Campaign is a great opportunity for pro-choice campaigners to organise in a serious way to counteract both the money of the anti-choice groups as well as the delaying tactic of the government.

The campaign needs to organise on a mass basis drawing in the thousands of people who want to fight for women's right to choose.

The abortion legislation is not included in the list of bills to be published before Easter, showing yet again the delaying tactics of the Government.

To put more pressure on the government the new campaign needs to organise a mass demonstration to demand this legislation in the spring.

CAHWT CORK RESOLVES TO SUSTAIN THE FIGHT

By JIM O'CONNELL

FOLLOWING the well attended national meeting on Saturday 12 January (see page four), the Cork Branch of CAHWT held its initial yearly meeting on Thursday 17 Jan at the Metropole Hotel in Cork City.

About 140 attendees discussed the implications of the recently published Property Tax law, a draconian piece of legislation that lays the onus of collecting this punitive levy with public service workers in the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

These workers, themselves targeted by severe austerity measures are now to be forced to assist in this latest assault on both themselves and their fellow members of the working class.

Also highlighted was the government's manipulation of the statistics as to the current figures on registrations which when properly reviewed, show that the figure of 70% compliance with registration demands as quoted by the government is actually closer to 50%.

The general mood was one of anger and defiance.

This escalation of the war on the working class will be met with the greater force of a people united in the face of a campaign of off-loading the debts of the economic and political elite onto the working class of Ireland.

There was general agreement that the Cork Branch of the campaign will continue the resistance and will initiate further actions in the near future that will support the national effort of defeating this tax and the bully-boy government that seeks to enforce it.

Greyhound increases costs for customers

By THOMAS McCARTHY

GREYHOUND Waste disposal has sunk to a new low.

Writing to customers in late December Greyhound confirmed that they would no longer "continue distributing recycling bags free of charge due to the high cost of distribution and the sharp fall in market value for recyclables".

The letter goes on to say that "Special Greyhound branded recycling bags will now be available to purchase from approved retailers at €9 (for six)."

This amounts to €160 a year if you use two bags a week on top of your ordinary bin charges.

Moreover, they will only collect recyclables in Greyhound approved bags.

This naked opportunism represents the real face privatisation as customers and workers get squeezed for the bottom line.

HMV workers occupy in Tallaght and Limerick

By BRIAN O'BOYLE

IN the last week we have heard much about the demise of one of the iconic stores on the British high street.

Far less publicised has been the plight of workers in HMV Ireland who have been unceremoniously dumped by their employer and ordered to leave their places of employment.

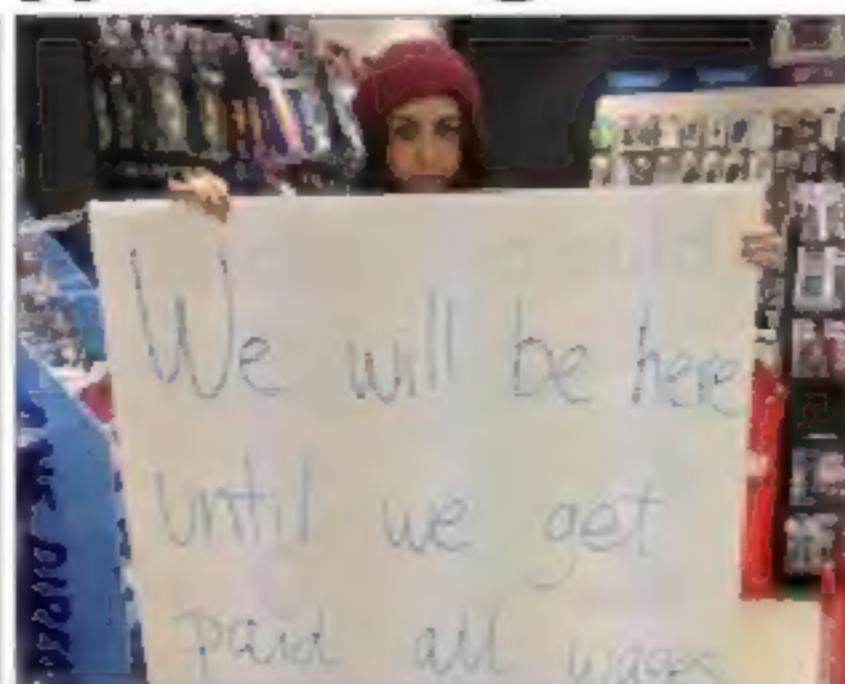
On Tuesday 15 January HMV Ireland went into administration.

Staff were immediately told to refuse gift cards sold over the Christmas period.

The next morning they were ordered to drop the shutters.

In the intervening period many staff members were subjected to verbal abuse from angry customers understandably upset at the company's behaviour.

This caused no end of stress but unfortunately far worse was yet to come.



On hearing that their colleagues in Limerick had occupied, all 12 staff members in Tallaght decided to follow suit.

On Friday morning they awaited their opportunity and when a guard from Deloitte

opened the shutters they all rushed in.

As Socialist Worker went to print the staff have refused to leave the building and speaking to the paper, Joe Redmond gave the reasons why,

WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

- Capitalism is wrecking the lives of millions and destroying the planet.
- A new society can only be constructed when the workers take control of the wealth and plan its production and distribution for human need and not profit.
- REVOLUTION**

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed. The banks, the army and police must be defeated to defend the interests of the wealthy.

To destroy capitalism, we need to replace the present state structures and create a workers' state based on much greater political and economic democracy.
- END RACISM AND OPPRESSION**

We oppose all forms of oppression and racism. This divides and weakens the working class.
- FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH**

We stand for workers unity against the Assembly politicians and Cameron government.

Like great socialist James Connolly, we believe that partition has brought about a 'carnival of reaction'.

We want to see an Irish workers' republic where all workers gain.
- FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY**

To win socialism socialists need to organise in a revolutionary party.

This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system.

We call for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.

We stand for fighting trade unions and for independent rank and file action.

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What Socialists Say

Home Help protestors show the way

AFTER promising to cut home help packages by upwards of one million hours, the government has been forced into a damaging u-turn.

Ministers had repeatedly insisted the cuts would go ahead as part of a supplementary budget to curb spending in the HSE.

However on budget day, Minister for Health, James Reilly spoke of the need to take "cognisance of the important work being done by carers in the community".

This cognisance was nowhere in sight in late September and the reality is that it was the determined campaign by workers and patients that eventually forced the government to relent.

Speaking to Socialist Worker, Noelle Coyle spoke of her delight at the outcome along with her growing sense of working class resistance.

"In late September around 80 of us were called into the SIPTU offices and told that we were going to lose 10,000 hours each month between September and December. This would have left most of us without any money coming up to Christmas and with the help of People Before Profit we decided to act. The first thing we did was to stage a protest outside the local HSE offices in Sligo town".

"When this didn't work we decided to take our protests onto the main street which we did every second weekend until two weeks before Christmas. Every time we were out there, people actually joined the protest and with all the cars beeping we knew we had support from local people". "I think the fact that we protested was absolutely crucial and I would say to all workers that the only way that we are going to win is to get out on the streets"

As of yet the government hasn't given the precise details of their change in policy, but Noelle and her colleagues have had all of their hours restored. This proves that fighting back is the only option open to people. Socialist Worker salutes the Home Help workers and pledges to stand with them again in the future.

Yet another imperialist adventure

LAST week the United Nations Security Council unanimously supported Western intervention in Mali.

Meanwhile very few people have come out against this latest imperial adventure as the enemy are Islamists—apparently aligned to Al Qaida.

In reality, the new scramble for Africa is a battle for resources and strategic interests - with the US and China joining old colonial powers like Britain and France.

In certain periods these imperialists have secured their interests by supporting dictators.

But they are just as happy to claim to be ushering in freedom at the end of a bomb or a bullet.

When Belgium invaded the Congo in the 1870s (to take control of its rubber) its excuse was the need to stop the slave trade.

In the following years forced labour killed half the country's population—some ten million people.

The imperialist cure was far worse than the original problem.

When the US invaded Somalia in 1992 people came out to welcome troops. But they soon came to support the resistance that drove the invaders out.

France's record is no better.

It sent troops to Rwanda during the genocide—but not to help the victims, rather it was to protect French-owned property and citizens.

Neoliberalism

The neoliberalism that is sweeping Africa has concentrated what investment there is in ever smaller areas. In Mali this is in the capital Bamako and its hinterland, with the rest of the country being left behind.

Radical Islamism is growing in these conditions as the primary vehicle for people's fears and frustrations.

Poverty is endemic in the region and the Islamists claims that they are fighting imperialism and the Western decadence of their own corrupt elites.

This may well be true, but even if the Islamists win they will not be interested in delivering progressive change.

The hope for the future of Africa lies in revolutionary movements like those in Egypt and Tunisia.

These show that it is possible to challenge imperialism, reject neoliberalism and provide for the poor and marginalised all at the same time.

Union leaders stuck on Croke Park



By KIERAN ALLEN

UNION leaders and government officials have opened negotiations on a new Croke Park deal, even though the current one is not due to expire until March 2014.

Behind these early moves lies an attempt to squeeze even more out of workers in the coming year.

The government has stated that it wants to cut another €1 billion from the public services over the next three years. This implies cuts of €300 million this year – on top of the sacrifices already made by workers.

It makes no sense

Workers entered the Croke Park agreement in 2010 after union leaders scuppered a campaign that had started with a one day stoppage.

In hindsight, many workers believe that even the stoppage was just a manoeuvre to gain extra leverage with the government.

The union leaders never had any real intention of fighting to reverse pay cuts, which have amounted to an average of 17 percent.

The result has been a huge wave of demoralisation, which has swept through the ranks of organised labour.

But while the actions of the union leaders caused this demoralisation, these same

leaders have also sought to turn it to their own advantage in order to disarm any resistance to the government.

At the start of the Croke Park agreement, for example, workers who earned under €35,000 were promised a share of the 'savings' made from cutbacks. But the government broke this part of the agreement and the union leaders did nothing.

The government and the union leaders also originally claimed that 17,000 people would be removed from the public sector—and these left behind would cover for their work. But the government pushed that up to 30,000 – and again the union leaders did nothing.

Now they want another 10,000 jobs removed – and still the union leaders refuse to rule this out.

Then in one of the most silent and calamitous defeats ever inflicted on workers, the government pushed up the retirement age of those currently aged under 50 to 68.

Once again they were let do it without a murmur of protest.

More Concessions

All of this has created a context in which the government demands ever more concessions from workers.

Their demands include:

- Cuts in overtime payments – while demanding longer opening times.

- Cuts in increments and allowances.

- Reduction in pension provision.

- Greater management by stress through use of performance assessment.

- Greater 'flexibility' in re-deploying workers away from their own workplaces.

If we had a union leadership that stood up for its members and broke with the Labour Party, it would reject these demands out of hand. It would be fighting for a reversal of the pay cuts and increases to cover the rate of inflation.

Instead, the ICTU leaders are playing a game of 'throwing shapes' with the state.

They hype up a big threat of compulsory redundancies but are preparing to sell a rotten deal as 'the least worst option'.

The reality is that the policies of austerity have failed. Despite all predictions, the economy languishes in near recession after four years of cuts.

If another €1 billion is taken out, wage packets will be even smaller and so the domestic economy – and jobs – will shrink further.

We need to create grassroots networks in the union to resist Croke Park 2 and to get rid of the union leaders who have led us onto this disastrous path.

Break the link between SIPTU and the Labour Party

THE three top leaders of SIPTU, Jack O'Connor, Joe Flynn and Patricia King are all members of the Labour Party.

Most full time union officials in SIPTU are members of the Labour Party. Those who are not have poor prospects of a career inside SIPTU. Regular meetings are also held between the union's top brass and the Labour Party.

Even the union's magazine is used as a propaganda mouthpiece for the Labour Party.

Yet Labour Ministers are leading the fight against workers rights. Brendan Howlin, for example, is orchestrating the demands for cuts in the pensions of public sector workers and demands an end to proper overtime payments.

It does not make any sense for the union to be linked to this party. We need an upsurge of grassroots anger to break the link.

Not another cent of union money should be used to prop up the Labour Party.

Labour TD's should be told to vacate all rooms in SIPTU offices and not use them as clinics.

A formal disaffiliation from Labour should occur.

The union newspaper should cease to promote the Labour Party.

Resolutions to this effect should be pushed through as many workplaces as possible. Petitions should be taken up to press support for these measures.

But resolutions and petitions alone will not shift

intransigent Labour Party hacks.

SIPTU members should also withdraw from the union's political fund until such time as its money ceases to be sent to the Labour Party.

You can get a form to withdraw from funding the Labour Party by contacting your union office today.

If there is any delay in sending you out this form, please contact the Change SIPTU grassroots group and they will facilitate you. You can contact them on Facebook.

CRISIS WATCH: II

Campaign Against Austerity Taxes moves into a new phase

By JAMES O' TOOLE

OVER 500 people from all over the country met in Dublin last weekend to plan resistance to the government's property tax.

This tax will see working people forced to pay anywhere between €250-€500 a year for the privilege of living in their own homes.

Even those in social housing will be forced to pay through increased rents from local councils.

The meeting was packed with organisers delaying proceedings to facilitate the numbers arriving. Buses came from Kerry, Donegal, the Midlands, Wexford, Waterford and many other regions of the country.

This is evidence that the CAHT campaign has maintained a serious network of activists from every corner of Ireland.

Strategy and Tactics

Paul Murphy MEP opened the day with an in depth overview of the legal situation before a series of speakers discussed the importance of strategy and tactics.

Cllr Brid Smith of the People Before Profit Alliance emphasized the importance of sustaining the incredibly successful boycott campaign.

In May the Revenue Commissioners will start to take this tax from all sources of family income, but the boycott reaffirms the illegitimacy of this tax and remains the bedrock on which we must build a mass campaign of civil disobedience.

She also emphasized that, unlike last year, this will not be a long drawn out battle as we only have a couple of months to bring resistance onto the streets.

Paul Shields, a rank and file SIPTU member, spoke in favour of joining the ICTU marches on 9 February to push the idea of a national day of direct action and to push the slogans of the campaign while engaging with thousands of rank and file workers.

The calls from various speakers



for mass direct action and a day of civil disobedience received an overwhelming applause.

The next step is to take those suggestions back for discussion in local groups.

The campaign will be building for meetings and protests in every area over the next few weeks.

People left the Red Cow feeling energised and ready for the fight ahead.

There was a real sense of purpose and determination as people broke up to travel home.

Socialist strategy

To beat this government the SWP is pushing for a whole calendar of mass resistance including:

Local meetings in every estate in February to build the mass base of



this campaign.

Joining the ICTU march on 9 February as the largest contingent and raising not only the property tax slogans but also the call for a national shut down.

This can really put pressure on the trade union leaders to act and win over many of the rank and file members.

Many trade unionists are already members of the campaign.

Call a mass assembly of all campaigns at the end of February to organise for a day of mass activity.

This mass assembly needs to reach out to any group that supports a national day of action.

Protest

Anational protest on 23 March which is a European wide day of action and coincides with the EU presidency in Ireland.

Merkel and other EU dignitaries will be fed €70 million worth of fine dining at our expense.

We need to make sure we're out in our thousands.

From March through April we need to keep up the momentum with a series of local actions and protests.

We need to make the Labour politicians who led their way into the Dáil feel the heat.

We should protest at local clinics and occupy government offices.

In Mid April we need a national day of local protests.

Finally on Saturday 27 April we need a national protest which builds for the day of action on 1 May when we want every area in the country to take mass direct action and shut down roads, ports, bridges and encourage rank and file trade unionists to walk out.

Crucial to all of this is an emphasis on grassroots building and mass civil disobedience.

It will take a struggle in every estate and workplace to pull people behind this campaign.

But the core activists of the campaign were ready for a fight in the Red Cow last week and they can inspire even wider layers to take action in the coming period.

Bankers want more home evictions

By KIERAN ALLEN

AN elite campaign to get more people evicted from their homes is bearing success – for the bankers.

The campaign began in August 2012 when Duvy Stockbrokers issued a report on mortgage arrears and stated that ‘an increased number of repossessions is desirable to help unlock and add transparency to the illiquid housing market.’ In other words they wanted more evictions.

Later, Fiona Muldoon a key figure in the Central Bank called for an end to ‘harmful among bankers’ and for ‘tough-minded’ decisions to deal with arrears.

The target of this elite campaign was a legal loophole that the group New Beginning found when they took a case to protect mortgage holders.

Before December 2009, lenders could use a 1964 law to evict people from their homes. But when this was repealed and replaced by the Land and

Conveyancing Law Reform Act in 2009, there was a drafting oversight because it only applied to loans taken out after December 1 2009.

When Justice Elizabeth Dunne heard a case for eviction in July 2011, she noted this loophole and ruled that there could only be re-possession, when full repayment had been demanded before December 2009.

As a result of this legal quagmire Ireland has had a far lower rate of evictions than Spain or the US which experienced similar property bubbles. Only 1,350 evictions occurred between 2009 and 2012. Too many certainly – but not enough to satisfy the bankers.

Troika Support

The elite campaign received the support of the Troika, who demanded that the government close this loophole. They also demanded that the weak voluntary code of conduct on mortgage arrears be changed. This restricted bankers from making more than three

calls a month to mortgage holders in distress. Even more ominously, the IMF demanded that there be a review of the tracker mortgage arrangements which prevented banks moving people onto different interest rate setting approaches.

More than half of Irish mortgages are tracker mortgages. This has helped alleviate mortgage distress, as they are tied to ECB interest rates which are currently very low.

The government has begun to comply with these demands. It is closing the legal loophole in the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act so that more people can be evicted.

According to the *Irish Independent* it is also set to change the Code of Conduct on mortgage arrears so that representatives of the banks can make unsolicited calls to people’s homes.

The result is that Ireland is entering a path that has already been followed in the US and Spain. In the US, five million people have suffered

foreclosures and in Spain 400,000 people have been evicted from their homes.

Yet ironically, while the Irish government is opening the road to evictions, the Spanish government is retreating from it. Recently, there was a well publicised case of a council worker, Amalia Egana, who committed suicide after an eviction. This coincided with a massive direct action campaign in Spain against evictions.

The Irish government is trying to cover its tracks by claiming that its Personal Insolvency Bill gives protection to mortgage holders. But in reality, this bill is geared more to the Buy to Let – or landlord sector – than the mass of home owners. The crucial provision is that the banks have a veto on any write down of debt – and they will use this to push for more evictions.

In the coming year, Ireland’s property crisis is set to enter a new phase of crisis. Mortgage arrears among landlords are running at twice

the level of home owners and many will be forced to sell.

This will in turn depress the housing market and push more people into negative equity.

The state’s only answer is to claim the problem is a purely individual one and they have created a panel of 2,700 accountants to offer advice – at a cost of €250 for those who avail.

Bail-out

This is simply not good enough – we need a bail out of those in distress.

■ There should be a total ban on evictions in the current climate.

■ Mortgages should be written down to reflect the real value of houses rather than the prices that pertained in the Celtic Tiger.

■ Mortgage holders should be allowed hand back property to bankers without being imprisoned in debt slavery for the rest of their lives.

■ NAMA properties should be used to increase the stock of social housing.

HOUSING SPECIAL

Property Tax without the property

By NICHOLA HARVEY

THE rents of some of the poorest tenants in the State are "inevitably" to increase in coming months as local authorities are "forced" to pass on the property tax.

While the debate over this draconian tax has so far focused on the cost to property-owners the impact will be felt by renters too, and most shamefully of all, by people renting from their local council.

This is because almost every dwelling in the land is liable for the property tax – due to begin in July – even those owned by local authorities.

It means that local authorities will have to pay tax to the Revenue Commissioners on the houses and flats they own. This in turn means local authorities – all of whom we know are broke – will have no choice but to pass on the cost to their tenants. Rent increases for those tenants least able to bear them, are inevitable.

Exposing the lie

This news totally exposes the sham at the heart of this unjust tax. This is not a tax on wealth.

This is a tax on the population, with no regard for whether people can afford to pay, whether homes are in negative equity or whether it will be levied on people who own nothing.

Moreover, the idea that this is a tax to pay for local services is little more than a sick joke. Take Dublin City Council for example.

This Council has a housing stock of 26,000. If the tax on each was to be a very modest €100 a year, the Council would be facing a new annual bill of €2.6 million.

Dún Laoghaire Rathdown would face an annual extra bill of €440,000; whilst Fingal County Council would be expected to pay Revenue at least €460,000.

Outside Dublin, there are 8,800 units of social housing in Cork City Council's area and there are 2,265 units owned by Galway City Council.

None of the Councils has said definitively how they are going to deal with the tax.

All say variously that as the legislation on the new property tax has only recently been enacted they "await guidance from the Department of Finance/Department of Environment regarding the implication for local authorities".

But as People Before Profit Councillor on Dublin City Council, Brid Smith, put it when contacted by Socialist Worker:

"Rent increases are highly likely, even inevitable. We've been discussing this at the Council's Finance Committee."

"The way things stand at the moment the only way the Council is going to be able to pay this tax is either to cut services, which are already cut to the bone, or pass it on to tenants."



"Even if they do cut services a little more, rent increases are inevitable which means more people are going to go into arrears."

The way Councils deal with tenants in arrears is to seek and even demand for payment.

They also refuse to carry out any maintenance work on tenants' homes while they are behind with their rent.

So the poorest again will be hit, abandoned to put up with homes falling into disrepair because of this regressive taxation.

Social Crisis

It is worth remembering that all of this is coming down the line as research from the Irish League of Credit Unions, has found that 1.59 million adults in Ireland now have just €50 or less at the end of the month once all essential bills have been paid; 46 per cent struggle to pay their utility bills on time and 34 per cent said they had sacrificed spending on food to pay their gas and electricity bills.

A majority are very worried about the property tax and how they would be able to pay it.

And again it must be remembered this noxious Government is doing this to the Irish people to pay for banks that have ruined the Irish economy, destroying lives and forcing hundreds of thousands to emigrate.

And so, the fight against the property tax is perhaps the most important fight the Irish people have on their hands this year.

By March house-holders will know what Revenue intends to take out of their pockets. By then the Councils will also know by how much they plan to increase rents.

If ever enough was enough, this is it. Renters and home-owners alike must take the battle to the streets together. Get involved. Join your local Campaign Against the Property Tax. We can and must beat this together.

What can I do?

- Make contact with your local CAHTT representatives.
- Push for a public meeting followed by a day of local protests.
- Put petitions to your local trade union branches opposing this taxation.
- Make sure all government TD's are aware of the anger of ordinary people at this unjust taxation.
- Make your presence felt on 9 February ICTU protest.

Privatisation by the back door



Northern Ireland trade unionists fight back

By EAMONN McCANN

THE formation of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was a triumph for the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

Now it's being abolished by DUP Minister Nelson McCausland – and neither Sinn Féin nor the SDLP seems willing to put up a fight.

McCausland wants to transfer 90,000 State-sector houses from the HE to a number of Housing Associations (HAs).

Because HAs are deemed not-for-profit organisations, it is argued that the houses will stay in the public sector.

In fact, McCausland's Department of Social Development has spelt out that, "The landlord function would be removed from the public sector to allow for access to private funding."

In law and in practice, the HAs will operate as private-sector entities, borrowing from the banks using housing stock as collateral.

Merge

They will be free to merge or take over other HAs. Less than a third of HA's set up under Thatcher remain as individual entities.

The British experience suggests that rents will rise, tenants' rights will be diminished and the incidence of evictions will soar.

When HAs merge, the new association will not be legally bound by agreements previously made with tenants.

However, when the issue came before the Assembly on 14 January, none of the parties rejected McCausland's proposals outright.

Instead, member after member complained that he had announced the plan to the newspapers before coming to the Assembly.

When Dolores Kelly of the SDLP criticised the substance of the proposals, McCausland shot back:

"When I sent the proposal around the Executive, the general thrust of the paper received very little criticism from her party colleague (the sole SDLP Minister, Alex Attwood)..."

"There were some issues here and there, but the core direction of travel is one that everyone has basically signed up to."

Signed-up

Neither the SDLP nor Sinn Féin has denied that they "basically signed up" to the privatisation plan.

McCausland provided no assurances about retaining the 4,200 HE jobs or keeping rents at their present level.

HAs can charge rents at market prices, whereas public-sector tenants have a legal right to a "reasonable" rent.

The failure of the Nationalist parties to challenge the proposals head-on will mystify many, given the significance of the Housing Executive's formation.

Systematic anti-Catholic discrimination in housing had been a huge issue for the civil rights

movement.

Former British Home Secretary James Callaghan recalled in his memoirs a meeting with the Stormont Cabinet in August 1969, just days after the arrival of British troops on the streets:

"They regarded... my proposal that there should be a single authority for the allocation and building of houses... with near-horror on political and administrative grounds for, of course, it went to the heart of political patronage."

Civil rights

Today, however, the parties claiming the legacy of the civil rights movement are intent above all else on keeping the Stormont show on the road.

So they bend to the wind of neo-liberalism, while tip-toeing around Neanderthals like McCausland.

(He thinks evolution is a Satanic lie and homosexuality an "abomination.")

Unison, Unite and Nipsa responded to the announcement with a series of pickets at HE offices around the North.

In Derry, every single worker in the main office in the city centre came out.

Socialists and housing activists are working to link the defence of jobs to defence of tenants' rights.

The campaign is likely to be prolonged.

Unity across the unions and between workers and tenants will be crucial.

Revolution in Action

As the revolutionary wave continues to grip Egypt, Socialist activist, Tina Mc Veigh, gives an eye witness account of the amazing scenes she witnessed on the streets of Cairo

In early January I spent 8 days in Cairo. As I walked into Tahrir square on the first day, I had goosebumps.

Here I was, in the heartland of the Egyptian revolution; a place where events of major historical importance continue to unfold.

Two years ago, a people's revolution brought down Mubarak, a dictator whose rule relied on neo-liberal economics, US imperialism and a ruthless police state.

Between January and May 2011, hundreds of thousands of people came out in peaceful demonstrations demanding the end of the regime. Alongside mass protests, workers came out on strike all over Egypt.

Police stations and the offices of the infamous Ministry of the Interior were burned down, as were the headquarters of Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP).

Major battles took place all over the country, but particularly in Tahrir (Liberation) Square, which had turned into a massive commune of resistance and a 'festival of the oppressed'.

Egyptians were united in their political and economic demands: freedom from the brutal regime, bread and social justice.

Today Tahrir square continues to boast symbols of the revolution.

Many of the roads are still closed off with barricades made of huge stone boulders.

Slogans of the revolution and those commemorating martyrs cover the walls of the surrounding streets, and protesters continue to camp in the square. The governing Muslim Brotherhood (MB) dare not remove these symbols for fear it would mobilize people in anger.

Tahrir is buzzing: stalls selling flags and t-shirts, cigarettes, street vendors selling food, protesters milling about and people going about their daily business.

The burnt out headquarters of Mubarak's NDP looms over the square and there are some state security people hanging around.

Economic Realities

While the symbolic occupation of Tahrir square continues, it is becoming obvious that for many Egyptians the revolution did little, if anything, to change their economic and social circumstances.

Mursi and the (MB) are under increasing pressure to deliver on the economic demands of the revolution.

However with the Egyptian economy deep in crisis, poverty has almost doubled and many struggle simply to eat.

Official statistics cite 70% of the population living beneath the poverty line.

In reality this is likely closer to 80%. Wheat prices have soared making bread costly for many families. For decades subsidized loaves have been essential to the survival of most working class, peasant and poor families.

Add to this the increase in the cost of butane, which many families rely on for cooking, and the daily food problems faced by many Egyptians are exacerbated.

Mursi and the MB are losing support. While the recent Constitutional Referendum passed on a vote of 67%, there was a very low turnout.

Fifty one million people were entitled to vote but only 17 million did so. People didn't want to vote on a referendum that would grant more power to the generals while attacking people's rights. Opposition to the Constitutional Referendum served to galvanise opposition to the Brotherhood and Mursi.

In the run up to and during the referendum over a million people protested at the Presidential palace, where several people lost their lives. Things appear to have calmed down since.

The sit-in at the palace - while it continues to be important - is small.

The presence of the military and the police has diminished. However, scepticism surrounding Mursi's ability to deal with Egypt's problems are mounting.

Mursi is under pressure to accept a loan from the IMF and with it will come the relentless attack on the poor and the working class we have experienced in Ireland.

In a recent national address, Mursi assured the Egyptians that these steps were necessary, hard choices that had to be made for the good of the nation.

These were difficult times and everyone was in it together.

Close your eyes and it might have been Kenny or Gilmore speaking at home. In Egypt too it is all about economic growth and satisfying the needs of the international financial markets despite the huge



social and economic cost to millions of ordinary people.

Military Power

Despite the removal of Mubarak, the state continues to spend a vast portion of the public budget on the police and the army, the equivalent of three departmental budgets, including health and education.

In fact, Mursi's recent Constitutional Referendum contained five (out of 237) clauses that serve to copper fasten military power.

Any budgetary demands made by the military can be granted without parliamentary review or approval. Army general's currently control 20% of the financial and industrial sectors. This position they use, not only to accumulate vast wealth and power, but more importantly, to smash workers' resistance.

When workers seized control of factories at the height of the revolution, the factories were simply shut down by the owners preventing the development of self-organised workplaces.

Also contained within the referendum were clauses relating to the plurality of unions in the professional sectors. This, the Muslim Brotherhood hoped, would allow them to exercise greater control over the work-

force where much of their support is located. However, in reality, the Brotherhood is rapidly losing support amongst this group.

Workers Struggle

There have been positive developments in the Egyptian workers' struggle - public doctors and prosecutors most recently have been out on strike and workers are becoming organized in some sectors.

But the protests that are a daily feature of Egyptian economic life generally lack political demands and solidarity.

Demands tend to be particular to their own workplaces, with many strikes lasting usually only two or three days. Protests have broken out at food and fuel distribution centres.

While I was there, I saw a strike outside the Department of Free Zones and Investment, with workers protesting for better wages and working conditions.

Young people were critical in the street battles of early 2011 and the Muslim Brotherhood's own youth wing was instrumental in forcing them into the revolution. They are now important to the balance of forces that constitute current opposition to Mursi and the

Brotherhood.

Socialists are currently attempting to capitalise on this youth opposition by building a Coalition for Social Justice. This coalition, if successful, will include a number of revolutionary organizations on the left, including the Revolutionary Socialists.

While the NSF presents itself as a liberal opposition, it contains elements of the old regime and Mubarak supporters.

The younger members of the NSF, however are beginning to pull away and are showing support for the possibility of a Coalition for Social Justice.

In the run up to the second anniversary of the revolution on 25 January, revolutionaries will be working hard on the ground to build mass protests all over Egypt.

They will be drafting demands, which will revitalise the slogans of the revolution: Freedom, jobs, bread and social justice. They will be going into workplaces and working class communities to unite Egyptians on the economic demands of the revolution.

For the first time in over thirty years, socialism now has a place in people's minds.

Socialist ideas are gaining ground and are being accepted in the mainstream. The left has occupied a place, not just in the media and in the debate, but in the realm of possibility.

If the revolution can deliver the political demands, why not the economic, social and cultural ones too?

Political Demands

In Egypt, as in Ireland, the IMF loan will force expenditure cuts and tax increases that will only serve to worsen the living conditions of millions of ordinary people.

The lessons for Ireland from what is currently happening in Egypt are these.

For the next six months as we go into workplaces, as we go out into the streets, as we build for protest and civil disobedience, we must underpin everything we do with clear political and economic demands.

We demand an end to austerity and the bank bailout. We demand tax on wealth and an increase in corporation tax. We demand the withdrawal of the property tax. We demand an end to this Labour-Fine Gael coalition.

To achieve any of this, we must bring the country to a standstill. Events here are also inspiring an outpouring of anger and creativity. People here want to contribute to change and want to engage with new political ideas.

As I left Cairo I was reminded of a t-shirt on one of the stalls in Tahrir that read: the power of the people is greater than those in power.

We will resist Greek Fascists

By DAVE SEWELL

THOUSANDS of anti-fascist protesters filled the streets of Athens on Saturday 19 January in an enormous demonstration against Golden Dawn.

This fascist party has rapidly become the third party in Greece, with 18 MPs and a strong showing in the polls.

Its logo is closely modeled on the Nazi swastika, and its members have led violent attacks on migrant workers and the left.

"There have been many attacks—hundreds of migrant workers have been injured," Javed Aslam, president of the Union of Immigrant Workers and chair of the Pakistani Community of Greece, told Socialist Worker.

"A few months ago there was so much fear in people," he said. "But there has been a change—people decided it was time to go outside and march with the anti-fascists."

"We're not going to let them beat migrant workers, and that's why this demonstration will be so big."

Moassis Litsis is a leading member of the Athens journalists union. He was involved in the workers' occupation of the Eleftherotypia newspaper last year.

He explained, "Sometimes people hear Golden Dawn and it sounds like any other party attacking the government.

"They have some anti-capitalist rhetoric—just like Hitler's Nazis did in the early days—and they attack the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

"But they blame the problems on foreigners."

"People are in a really desperate situation. Their living conditions deteriorate every day, and it's difficult to find jobs."

"It's easy for Golden Dawn to talk to them about immigrants, even to revive the old anti-semitism by talking about 'Jewish bankers'."

Moassis says that the left has to challenge Golden Dawn.

"The coalition government is very weak and there's a real danger that Golden Dawn could end up being invited to help govern Greece."

"Already the right wing Independent Greeks party has run a joint initiative with them in parliament."

Immigrant

"Most of the demonstrations so far have been led by the far left, and the immigrant communities who were the first to be attacked."

"They have succeeded in stopping some Golden Dawn marches into immigrant neighbourhoods. But now the whole left needs to unite."

"We need to remind people what happened under the Nazis."

This is the first anti-fascist demonstration to win broad support from all the main left wing parties.

Dimitris Tsoukalas, an MP in the radical left coalition Syriza, told Socialist Worker why he was supporting the demonstration.

"The xenophobia and racism is really difficult to deal with," he said.

"So we try to talk to people in schools and offices to show that there is another way to understand austerity. The enemy is not the poor immigrant, but the government."

He said that far from challenging Golden Dawn, the Greek establishment is playing into their hands.

"The police do nothing to stop their actions—they can do what they want, and maximise the attacks on immigrants."

"And the government doesn't want to lose votes to



its right, so it is basically doing what Golden Dawn proposes.

"For example they had an operation named after Zeus Xenios, the Greek god of hospitality, that arrests people who have the 'wrong' colour skin."

"More than 60,000 people have been arrested and checked in police stations, and more than 4,000 have been taken to detention camps."

But Greece's working class has shown its strength in three years of massive strikes, demonstrations and workplace occupations.

If it turns its strength against the fascists it has the power to beat them.

"We're hearing good reports from everywhere," said Javed. "Every municipality is sending buses."

"People see that what's happening is not human and not acceptable."

This could be the biggest demonstration in two years, and it will be very useful in

stopping the racist and fascist attacks.

"Athens will be full of marchers. This will break people's fear."



Tories and Nazis march against gay marriage in France

By NICHOLA HARVEY

A right wing demonstration of around half a million people marched in Paris on Sunday 13 January against gay marriage.

Equal marriage was a central pledge of Socialist Party president Francois Hollande in his election campaign last year. But it has come under sustained attack from the right.

Hollande's government has already dropped other election policies, such as giving foreign citizens the right to vote.

Key ministers have pitched to the

right as the government fails to deliver on its promise to stop job cuts or tax the rich.

Opposing equal marriage has been a rallying point for France's divided right wing.

The Tory UMP party of Nicolas Sarkozy and right wing Catholic organisations supported the march.

Mosque

So did the fascist Front National (FN) and other far right groups—including one that occupied a mosque building

site in November.

UMP leader Jean-Francois Copé had no problem marching on the same demonstration as outright Nazis.

This follows six million votes for the FN at last year's elections, and an unopposed march in Paris against "Islamofascism" in November.

A demonstration in support of equal marriage is planned for Sunday of next week. Even in France, 56 percent of people support equal marriage.

But the left needs to mobilise to stem the tide of reaction.

News in Brief

Defend Nigeria's socialist editor

By BABA AYE,
Socialist Workers League, Nigeria

SOCIALISTS in Nigeria are taking action to defend Socialist Worker editor Femi Aboisade, whose house was attacked twice. The first time, on 22 November, he suffered machete wounds.

On 29 December, though his attackers could not gain entrance, they called him to come out. They rebuked him for not heeding warnings.

Femi has been at the fore of an anti-corruption crusade in Ibadan Polytechnic where he works.

His union branch held an emergency congress on 8 January. It issued a two-week ultimatum to management to unearth the causes of the attacks.

It also set up a seven-man independent panel to investigate.

Foxconn strikers march in China

OVER 1,000 workers struck last week over working conditions at a Foxconn plant in China.

The workers demonstrated through the streets of Fengcheng in Jiangxi province.

Some 200 workers on the night shift began the strike on Thursday night, with more labourers on the day shift joining them the next day.

Workers threatened to not return to the plant after February's New Year holiday.

Six arrested after new India rape

SIX men have been arrested and police are looking for a seventh after a woman was raped on a rural bus in the Punjab region of India.

Earlier this month protests filled the streets of Delhi as men and women protested against rape and the state's complicity in the oppression of women.

The protests were sparked by the gang rape and murder of a 23 year old woman earlier this month.

Socialist Worker



END SECTARIAN PROTESTS... FIGHT FOR FOOD NOT FOR FLAGS

This year has begun as last year ended, with protests about the Union Jack at Belfast City Hall.

Most people had expected the protests to disintegrate over the holidays, but they continued right through December and are now into their second month.

In the face of widespread anger, Loyalists have maintained quite a significant number of protests – mostly around Belfast but also in other parts of the North. However it has to be said that numbers on the streets are relatively small when compared with previous examples of Loyalist mobilization. More than 25 years ago 100,000 people came out against the Anglo Irish Agreement.

By comparison there is a fraction of that number, 1,000 at most, on the streets of Belfast demonstrating about the union flag.

Cuts not culture

The fact that Loyalists failed to turn up when the Union Jack was actually flown for Kate Middleton's birthday exposes the reality that the flag issue is merely a symbol of a much deeper frustration at a perceived injustice being perpetuated on Protestants under the Good Friday agreement.

The dire poverty in many working class protestant communities merely seems to confirm this analysis, but the truth is that in terms of deprivation 80% of the worst wards in Northern Ireland are still predominantly nationalist areas.

Over the last 15 years working class people on both sides of the community have been left behind by a process that has embedded sectarianism in the institutions of the state.

The cuts have only made matters worse in this respect as politicians on 'both sides' promote the idea that if only they had more power, 'their' own communities would be better off.

Sinn Fein and the DUP have, for example, both accepted neoliberal policies which are leading to cuts of 4,000 teaching jobs and 1,200 support staff.

But even as they push them through they can continue their symbolic game-playing over which community suffers the most.

The most recent Welfare Reform Act is another good example of this trend.

Under plans drawn up by the Tories in London working people will be forced into regular humiliating tests in order to receive their social entitlements; many young people will lose their housing benefit; and it will make it easier to conscript



people into low wage jobs.

Sinn Fein and the SDLP both put on a show of opposition in the NI Assembly and voted against the Bill. But neither of them used a measure known as a 'Petition of Concern' whereby they could have blocked the bill with 30 signatories.

The point was to play the game of division – and then unite with the DUP and UUP to actually implement the measure.

The result of more than a decade of these policies has been economic misery for both Catholic and Protestant workers.

This is the real roots of the frustrations, which loyalist paramilitaries seek to exploit in a rightwing direction.

But the flag protests – and the rise of dissidents in parts of the Catholic population – are also a clarion call for the building of a genuine left in the North.

The Left and the North

A solid socialist organisation will never be built unless it is formed around a politi-



cal backbone that understands both the

nature of Loyalism and Republicanism.

Against the reactionary policies of

Loyalism, socialists assert that the common interests of Catholic and Protestant workers must come before cultural sym-

bols which promote the identity of one over the other.

Building class solidarity is the only way to truly triumph over sectarianism.

It is also the only way that ordinary people can expect to hold onto their much needed services.

Inside

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Eamonn McCann
on the crisis
in the housing
executive